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WHY WE HAVE AN INTRINSIC
REASON TO BE RATIONAL

by

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DEDICATION

To my Whitney for her unwavering love and support.

ABSTRACT

Niko Kolodny makes the following claims. *Claim 1*: We don't have reason, in general, to comply with rational requirements for their own sake. *Claim 2*: Even if we do have reason to comply with rational requirements, in general, and, for their own sake, it doesn't follow that we have that same reason in any particular case. In this paper, I argue that both *Claim 1* and *Claim 2* are false. I provide a novel argument which explains why we have reason to comply with rational requirements (*for their own sake*) both in general, and in particular cases. Along the way I offer my own theory of achievements and defend it against objections. The general structure of my argument looks like this:

The Value Argument

P1: If doing something would constitute something of (at least) *pro tanto* final value (where 'final' just means 'valuable for its own sake' and, thus, not merely instrumentally valuable), then that is, *ceteris paribus*, a reason to do it.

P2: Being subjectively rational (i.e. complying with rational requirements) is an achievement.

P3: Achievements have *pro tanto* final value.

Therefore, we have reason to be subjectively rational, for its own sake, both in general, and in particular cases.

Why We Have An Intrinsic Reason To Be Rational

Introduction

I agree with Niko Kolodny that one is subjectively rational on some occasion when one complies with rational requirements on that occasion (Kolodny, 516)¹. But what rational requirements are there? In this paper, I will understand rational requirements to include, but not be limited to, the following:

Belief Consistency - The requirement not to believe that p if you believe that not- p .

Instrumental Rationality - The requirement to intend to ϕ if you believe that ϕ -ing is a necessary means to something else you intend.

Enkrasia - The requirement to intend to ϕ if you believe you ought to ϕ .

Intention Coherence - The requirement not to intend to ϕ if you intend not to ϕ .

Belief Closure - The requirement to believe that q if you believe that if p then q and believe that p .

Kolodny thinks there is *no* intrinsic reason to be subjectively rational.² That is, he thinks we don't have reason to be subjectively rational *for its own sake*. Kolodny claims that "We can contrive situations...in which people have instrumental reasons for avoiding irrationality" but "One would not comply with rational requirements for their own sake,

¹ All Kolodny citations are from his 2005.

² I use the phrases "subjective rationality", "practical rationality", and the term "rationality" synonymously.

When Kolodny uses the phrase "intrinsic reason" he means something like a reason to do, pursue, or care about, something *for its own sake*. For example, he says, "[The potential problem of losing one's status as an agent or believer when one is, in a single instance, irrational] would not arise, of course, if our reason for complying with rational requirements were an *intrinsic reason*, a *reason to avoid irrationality for its own sake*" (544, emphasis added). Jason Bridges also takes Kolodny in this way. See his "Rationality, Normativity, and Transparency" in *Mind* 118 (2009): 353-367.

[one would comply only] because doing so brought about something for which one has independent reasons” (Kolodny,543). Kolodny’s claim is that we have no reason to comply with rational requirements for their own sake. He thinks that this is true both in general and in particular cases.³ For example, he says, “...there is ground for doubting that there are reasons to comply with *any* rational requirements. If there were reasons to comply with rational requirements, what would they be?” (Kolodny, 542) He continues,

Rationality is normative for any believer or intender, *no matter what his circumstances*. If its normativity consists in reason to conform to rational requirements, then this reason must be more general (Kolodny, 543. Emphasis added).⁴

He goes further when he suggests,

...if it is true that we have [a] reason to comply with rational requirements as a rule, it does not follow that we have this reason to comply with them in any particular case. When we say that someone ‘ought rationally’ to have an attitude, we are saying something about what ‘ought’ to happen here and now (Kolodny,543).

Basically, Kolodny makes the following claims.

Claim 1: We don’t have reason, in general, to comply with rational requirements *for their own sake*.

Claim 2: Even if we do have reason to comply with rational requirements, in general, and, *for their own sake*, it doesn’t follow that we have that same reason in any particular case.

³ When Kolodny claims that we don’t, “as a rule” (pg. 543) or, in general, have an intrinsic reason to be rational, I take him to mean that *in most cases* we don’t have an intrinsic reason to be rational and even if we did have such a reason to be rational *in most cases* it doesn’t follow that we would have that same reason in *every* case. That is, there will be particular instances in which one could be rational but would have no intrinsic reason to be rational.

⁴ Kolodny sometimes refers to rationality as normative when he really means that it is only *apparently* normative. Nicholas Southwood notes the same obscurity in Kolodny’s writing. See Southwood’s (2008) page 13.

In what follows I will argue that both *Claim 1* and *Claim 2* are false. I provide a novel argument that explains why we have intrinsic reason to be subjectively rational both, in general, and in particular cases.⁵ The general structure of my argument looks like this:

The Value Argument

P1: If doing something would constitute something of (at least) *pro tanto* final value (where ‘final’ just means ‘valuable for its own sake’ and, thus, not merely instrumentally valuable), then that is, *ceteris paribus*, a reason to do it.

P2: Being subjectively rational (i.e. complying with rational requirements) is an achievement.⁶

P3: Achievements have *pro tanto* final value.

Therefore, we have reason to be subjectively rational, for its own sake, both in general, and in particular cases.

Valuable Things Give Us Reasons (Defense of P1)

It is widely accepted that reasons are provided (or, explained) by facts about value.⁷ That is, something being valuable can give us a reason to care about or pursue it. Further, I take it that P1 has strong intuitive appeal and, as such, is mostly uncontroversial. It is plausible that Kolodny would himself find P1 uncontroversial. He says,

[The problem of one losing one’s status as an agent or believer because one is, in a single instance, irrational] would not arise, of course, if our reason for complying with rational requirements were an intrinsic reason, a reason to avoid irrationality for its own sake. That would be a reason to

⁵ While Kolodny provides various arguments in favor of *Claim 1* and *Claim 2*, I won’t recount those here. This is because my response to Kolodny doesn’t depend on the reasons he provides in favor of *Claim 1* and *Claim 2*.

⁶ In order to head-off a potential objection, I am assuming, with Kolodny, that in order for one to “rationally” resolve a conflict in one’s attitudes and, thus, be subjectively rational, one must actually *reason* in some “[b]road, but recognizable sense of reason...” (Kolodny, 520). So, one couldn’t comply with rational requirements in just *any* way and still be said to be subjectively rational. Thanks to Jeff Behrends for convincing me to address this worry.

⁷ Philosophers such as Derek Parfit (2011), Joseph Raz (2002), and Thomas Scanlon (1998) have argued, in one way or another, that reasons are provided by facts about value. Theories of reasons which suggest that reasons are provided (or explained) by value are commonly referred to as *objectivist theories of reasons*. Subjectivist theories of reasons suggest that reasons are provided (or explained) by an agent’s desires.

comply with each and every rational requirement. But is there such a reason? We have intrinsic reasons to care about persons, relationships, justice, art, science, the natural environment, and so on, for their own sake. All of that is familiar enough. But is being subjectively rational another substantive value that we actually weigh against these others? (Kolodny, 544-45)

As Kolodny clearly implies, a plausible way to account for the reason we have to create works of art, exact justice, care about persons, relationships and so on is because those things are valuable. However, he doubts that being subjectively rational is a valuable kind of thing on a par with the other things listed. While Kolodny suggests that the things he lists are of substantive value⁸, it is plausible that at least some of the things on his list (e.g. relationships, persons, art and so on) are valuable for their own sake and because of this provide us an intrinsic reason to pursue or care about them.

Kolodny explicitly claims that something being valuable *does* give us a reason to pursue (and care about) that thing. For example, he imagines that one might say, "...if [being subjectively rational] is valuable, then we have a reason not only to preserve it, but also to manifest it whenever the opportunity presents itself." In response to this, he says, if plausible, this claim "would be of the right kind. It would give us a reason to comply with each and every rational requirement" (Kolodny, 545).

My Value Argument is precisely the kind of argument that Kolodny thinks could work to show that we have an intrinsic reason to be subjectively rational. This is because, as I will argue, subjective rationality is an achievement and, as such, is valuable for its own sake. This means that we have an intrinsic reason to pursue (or care about)

⁸ According to Kolodny, in order for something to be of substantive value it must "prevent suffering or expand the frontiers of knowledge" (Kolodny, 545-546). So, I understand substantive value to be a species of instrumental value as opposed to final value. I'll say more about the distinction between instrumental and final value later.

subjective rationality. Subjective rationality is *itself* a valuable kind of thing in the world because it is an instance of a more general valuable kind—it's an achievement.

Of course, the value of any of the things mentioned above can be defeated. After all, presumably there is more than one thing in the world with final value and, again, presumably, we care about more than just one thing. For example, the value of creating a work of art, and the reason one has to create that work of art can be outweighed by reasons not to create it. Maybe the resources involved in creating that particular work of art could be used to alleviate the suffering of an innocent person. In that situation, creating the work of art may have some value, and one might, on account of that value have some reason—in a very insignificant sense of “reason”—to create it.⁹ However, the value of the work of art and one's reason to create it is obviously outweighed by the value of alleviating the suffering of an innocent person.

All of this is plausible. So, I will now move to discuss the nature of achievements and their value.

Achievements and Their Value (Defense of P3)

It's clear that we value achievements. All else being equal, we would prefer a life marked by achievements over a life marked by lucky success. But just what is an achievement? And what kind of value do achievements have? In this section I set out to answer both of these questions. I then apply the relevant insights to subjective rationality.

Greco on Achievements. John Greco says that an achievement is a success *because of* one's relevant abilities (Greco, 2010). The phrase “because of” designates a

⁹ I'm in agreement with Mark Schroeder that reasons can have more or less weight. For more on this see his 2007, page 94.

causal explanation. That is, when one is said to experience an achievement one's relevant abilities are a salient causal feature in the production of that achievement. For example, Smith can't *achieve* hitting the game winning shot unless he has basketball abilities. He may hit the game winning shot without basketball abilities—say, because of luck—but we won't call his hitting the shot an achievement unless we can also attribute to him basketball abilities which are causally responsible for his hitting the game winning shot. The idea is that one's abilities being a salient causal explanation of one's success helps avoid the charge that one's success was the product of luck.

Further, when we say that someone achieved x, we're making a credit attribution. And a plausible way to account for whether or not one deserves to be given credit for achieving x, is to determine whether or not x was produced by the agent's relevant abilities. If x wasn't produced by the agent's relevant abilities then it's hard to see how x wasn't just the product of luck. And, intuitively, achievements are incompatible with luck.¹⁰

Objection. Greco's account of achievements is not without its problems. For example, it isn't clear what Greco means by "success". So, in this way, his account is vague. Does "success" mean meeting one's goals? Or is it simply producing an end one intended? Or does it mean something else? Greco never says.¹¹

Duncan Pritchard has understood Greco's use of "success" in a broad sense. That is, Pritchard takes Greco to mean something like *producing what one intends to do at a*

¹⁰ There is a kind of luck (e.g. environmental luck) that seems to be compatible with achievements. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss that here. For more on this see Duncan Pritchard's 2010.

¹¹ While the distinction between one's intentions and one's goals isn't abundantly clear, I think the notion is clear enough to forego saying anything else about it here.

particular time (Pritchard, 2010, p. 22). This broad understanding of “success” causes problems for Greco’s account of achievements because it entails the counterintuitive conclusion that for a normally functioning human being, in normal circumstances, scratching one’s nose is an achievement.

A refinement and an objection. One might attempt to avoid this problem by suggesting that a necessary condition of any achievement is that it be difficult (James, 2005; Bradford 2007).¹² If this is right then scratching one’s nose won’t be an achievement. After all, when in normal circumstances, it isn’t difficult for a normally functioning human to scratch her nose. However, while difficulty may contribute to the value of an achievement *qua* achievement, it doesn’t follow that difficulty is a necessary condition of achievements. Presumably, it wasn’t difficult for God to create the world. And if anything gets to count as an achievement, surely the creation of the world counts. In fact, it might be the most impressive achievement of all achievements.

If you don’t like the God case, consider a situation in which Smith, a human being with impressive intellectual powers discovers a cure for cancer with ease. It would be absurd to say that *he* didn’t achieve something when he discovered the cure for cancer.¹³

If Smith’s case is still too fanciful, consider the following cases from Pritchard.

[W]hen Tiger Woods sinks a putt with ease, or when Rafael Nadal hits a winning shot with no trouble at all, we would certainly regard the

¹² To be more precise, James thinks that achievements which can contribute to the meaningfulness of one’s life must be difficult. I think this idea is mistaken. After all, becoming a productive member of society is, for most of us, pretty easy. Even if we face some adversity, we aren’t naturally disposed to do things that would disqualify us as being productive members of society. That is, we don’t have to work hard to attain to, or keep, the status *productive member of society*. But surely being a productive member of society is an achievement that can contribute to the meaning of one’s life. It’s the sort of status that can be appealed to in order to encourage one who is in a state of mellon collie and so on.

¹³ Thanks to John Fraiser for suggesting this particular case.

successes in question as achievements, even though they are, for them at least, easy successes (Pritchard, 2010, 22).

Further, one can imagine that it was easy for Michael Jordan to dunk a basketball after jumping from the free-throw line. It seems intuitively plausible that Jordan has, in this case, achieved something. But if this is right, difficulty isn't a necessary condition of achievements. However, one might object that Jordan's case shows that difficulty *is* required for achievements because Jordan worked hard and spent many years in difficult training so that he could dunk a basketball after jumping from the free-throw line.

In Jordan's case (as well as the other cases) there are actually two achievements with which he can be credited. The first is something like achieving the status *being a premier basketball player* while the other achievement is *dunking the basketball after jumping from the free-throw line*. Ordinarily, we don't just credit Jordan with achieving the status *premier basketball player* (although he is that); we also credit him with achieving particular exercises of his abilities even when those exercises and the outcomes they produce aren't difficult for him. So, while we might indeed say Jordan has achieved something that is difficult to achieve, namely, achieving the status *premier basketball player*, we don't, on account of that fact, require that *every* achievement be difficult.

Still further, many normally functioning people in the United States have graduated from kindergarten and didn't have to put much effort into it. That is, graduating kindergarten was, for most of us, pretty easy. However, many of us had parents who congratulated us and told us that we had really achieved something. And, if they were being sincere in their congratulatory remarks—and I think we have no good reason to think otherwise—then it seems clear enough that not all achievements are difficult.

A New and Improved Account of Achievements. What we need is an account of achievements that doesn't entail the counterintuitive conclusion that scratching one's nose is, normally, an achievement, and, further, we need an account that doesn't require difficulty as a necessary condition of achievements since, as we have seen, not all achievements are difficult. Further, the account must not be *ad hoc*. I offer the following account of achievements which succeeds in all of these respects.

Achievement - An achievement is a success-through-ability where "success" means meeting (or having met) *appropriate* personal and/or societal goals (or expectations).

"Appropriate" as it relates to goals means: *goals which don't require one (or, the members of a group) to flout one's (or, their) moral duties or act imprudently.* To be imprudent can include, but is not limited to, being foolish or silly (in a very commonsensical sense of those terms), not providing for one's future well being, and so on. A personal goal is a goal (or expectation) one sets for oneself and a societal goal is a goal (or expectation) that most members of a society place on other members of their society. So, on *Achievement*, one experiences an achievement just in case one meets appropriate personal and/or societal goals *because of* one's relevant abilities and the goals in question aren't immoral goals nor are they imprudent.

There are at least four virtues of this account of achievements. First, it reflects how we often talk about achievements. For example, we often say things like, "Jones achieved his goals" or, "Jones achieved what was expected of him." So, in this way, *Achievement* reflects natural language and is, therefore, not *ad hoc*. Second, *Achievement* doesn't entail that scratching one's nose is, in normal circumstances, an achievement.

This is because we (normally functioning humans) don't normally set as a goal to scratch noses and even if we did, it would be imprudent to do so. Intuitively, it *just is* silly for a normally functioning person to set as a goal *scratch nose*.¹⁴ We do regularly *intend* to scratch our noses but this isn't the same thing as setting as a goal *scratch nose*.¹⁵ Third, it gives us the right result in the case of easy achievements. For example, God's creating the world is an achievement for God because, we can imagine, he set as a goal to create the world and met that goal by way of his relevant abilities. The same is also true of the other cases of easy achievements considered above. For example, one's graduating kindergarten counts as an achievement because it is a goal or expectation placed on one by society.¹⁶

Lastly, we naturally use the term "achievement" as a term of praise and appreciation. That is, when we think about achievements we think about praising the one credited with the achievement or appreciating something that one has done. So, *Achievement* captures what we want the concept of achievements to do for us by bringing to light the fact that the goals involved in any achievement must be *appropriate* goals.¹⁷ So, again, in this way it is not *ad hoc*. One further consequence of the appropriate goals requirement is that there are no, so called, "evil achievements". We simply don't praise individuals (or a society) for being immoral even if they set as their goal to be immoral.

¹⁴ This does not entail that it would be imprudent for a person recovering from a severe accident to set as a goal *scratch nose*. For someone in that kind of situation it would not be imprudent to set as a goal *scratch nose*.

¹⁵ See footnote 11.

¹⁶ And in those cases in which kindergarten-aged children set as their goal to graduate kindergarten, it counts as an achievement of a personal goal *and* societal goal.

¹⁷ Thanks to Waldemar Rohloff for a conversation about the nature of happiness which encouraged me to continue to pursue this line of thought.

Objection. One might object that *Achievement* gets us the wrong result in some cases and, thus, fails as an adequate account of achievements. For example, imagine a situation in which a society doesn't have it as a goal to protect the civil liberties of its citizens. But now imagine that Jones sets as his goal *raise awareness about unjust violations of civil liberties*. Further, imagine that Jones meets his goal by way of his relevant abilities. It seems clear enough that Jones has achieved something in this situation. However, since Jones's society doesn't have it as a goal to protect civil liberties or raise awareness about how it is unjust not to protect them, then, given *Achievement*, Jones hasn't achieved anything. So, *Achievement* gives us the wrong result in Jones's case and cases like it.¹⁸

Response. It isn't clear that *Achievement* gives us the wrong result in Jones's case. While Jones can't be credited with achieving a goal society set for him, it isn't right to say that he hasn't achieved something. Jones's achievement is, clearly, a *personal achievement* because he met, by way of his relevant abilities, an appropriate goal he set for himself.

While a more fully developed account of achievements is desirable and might include a list of what particular goals count as appropriate goals as well as a theory about how to weight personal and societal goals for purposes of deliberation and action, it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore these issues. The goal here has been to provide an intuitively plausible account of achievements which deals with (at least) some hard cases.

¹⁸ Thanks to John Brunero for raising this concern.

Now that I have said something about the nature of achievements, I will move to discuss the value of achievements.

The Value of Achievements. In almost any enterprise where success is possible, we make a distinction between success that comes by way of ability and mere lucky success. And, intuitively, success (as defined above) that comes by way of (i.e., is *caused by*) one's relevant abilities is more valuable than success that comes by way of luck. I think this idea holds strong intuitive appeal. But before I say more about it, it will be useful to say something about the term "value".

Whenever we talk about the value of something we need to ask what we mean by "value". I will distinguish between two types of value: final value and instrumental value. Something has final value if it is valuable for its own sake. Something is instrumentally valuable if it is valuable for some other end. That there is a distinction between these two kinds of value doesn't entail that the same object (or state of affairs) cannot have both final and instrumental value. I'll say more about this later. In the meantime, a couple of examples are in order.

When a son asks his father why he must get a job, his father may reply, "Because you need to be a productive member of society and take care of yourself." One might imagine a son stricken by laziness asking, "But why should I take care of myself?" The son may continue with questions like this. But at some point the father's responses terminate in some final end. He might respond with, "Because taking care of yourself *just is* valuable—that's just what you need to do!" In this situation, the father is suggesting

that taking care of oneself has final value; it is valuable for its own sake—there is no other instrumental reason that can be given to account for its worth.

Imagine another scenario. Pete's high school basketball team is playing in the state tournament and desperately needs a win in order to avoid being eliminated. We could imagine that to Pete and his teammates, hitting the game-winning shot is not valuable for its own sake. It is only valuable inasmuch as it keeps them from being eliminated from the tournament—he (nor his team) cares whether the shot is produced by luck or skill. That is, it is only instrumentally valuable to them.

Some of the time one won't care how one experiences some success. For example, if Smith were in desperate need of money he might not care if he received a promotion at work because of his relevant abilities or because of luck. However, it seems to me that most of the time, most of us *do* care about how we arrive at our successes. All other things being equal, we would want to receive a promotion at work because our relevant abilities set us apart from the other applicants and not merely because the boss drew names out of a hat or happened to think we were attractive. This suggests that that achievements have final value—they are valuable for their own sake.

The fact that something is valuable for its own sake doesn't mean that that same thing isn't also instrumentally valuable. Imagine that I set as my goal to get a promotion at work and my primary motivation is that it will bring me more money. It is in this way instrumentally valuable to me. There are two ways I can get the promotion—*via* my relevant abilities or *via* luck. Now imagine that God tells me that I will get the promotion no matter what. Since he's being extra nice today he gives me the choice to get the

promotion through lucky means or, alternatively, through my relevant abilities. It seems to me that I would, all else being equal, choose the second option—and this despite the fact that I primarily want the promotion so that I make more money. If I’m going to get it either way, I want to get it through my abilities—I want to achieve it. Since the instrumental value of the God-given options is equal, the only thing left to say is that achieving the promotion has final value—it’s valuable for its own sake.

Imagine the case this way. I set as my goal to get a promotion at work because I’m in desperate need of money. I may not, at first, care how I get the promotion—luck or ability, it doesn’t matter to me. Now imagine that I get it because of my abilities. It seems right that I should, all else being equal, look back on the situation and say something like, “I didn’t try to get the promotion because it was an achievement. However, now that I’m reflecting on it and see that it’s an achievement, it’s all the more valuable—I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

In this situation, the state (or, process) *being promoted* turns into an achievement because of the way *I* interact with it. If it’s a goal of mine (or, one placed on me by society) and my abilities are a salient causal feature in bringing it about, it’s an achievement. If they’re not, it’s simply a lucky success. That is, it changes into a different kind of thing—namely, an achievement—than it would otherwise be (i.e. a mere lucky success) were it not a goal and my abilities not responsible for me meeting that goal. And when this change in kind occurs, a new kind of value accrues to the state (or, process) *being promoted*. As an achievement, being promoted is valuable for its own sake—it

turns into the kind of thing we intuitively find ourselves caring about for its own sake. But this hardly means that it loses its instrumental value of bringing me more money.

There is one last thing to note about the value of achievements. The final value of achievements is *pro tanto* in character. As I mentioned earlier, achieving creating a particular work of art might have final value but that value might be outweighed because of certain features of creating that work of art. For example, maybe the resources involved in creating that particular work of art could be used to alleviate the suffering of an innocent person. Situations like this suggest that the value of achievements can be outweighed.

Subjective Rationality is an Achievement (Defense of P2)

Now that I have said something about the nature and value of achievements, my goal in this section will be to show that subjective rationality is an achievement (on *Achievement*) and, as such, has final value. This is important because if subjective rationality is a valuable kind of thing then we have a reason to be rational for its own sake—we have a reason to be rational precisely because of the kind of thing rationality *is*.

Complying with rational requirements necessarily involves one forming beliefs and intentions as well as making logical inferences based on one's beliefs. Clearly, forming beliefs and intentions as well as making logical inferences involves the exercise of our cognitive abilities. I take this point to be uncontroversial. If cognitive abilities aren't the abilities at play in forming beliefs and intentions and making inferences it isn't clear what other kinds of abilities might play this role. So, I conclude that practical rationality involves *at least* the exercise of one's cognitive abilities.

I say “at least” because one might also be inclined to say that one’s will is an ability that is involved in practical reasoning. According to John Broome, at least one rational requirement is the *enkrasia* requirement: the requirement to intend to x if you believe you ought to x. We sometimes talk as if the will is something we can get better or worse at controlling and exercising. If this is right, then one might consider the will to be an ability, of one kind or another, involved in practical rationality. Whether or not one’s will is a cognitive ability is, in my mind, an open question—I take no position on that issue here. Further, one might insist, as did Aristotle, that all practical reasoning must culminate in some physical (i.e. non-mental) action.¹⁹ If this is right, practical reasoning will rightly be said to involve more than one’s cognitive abilities—it will also involve one’s physical abilities. Whether or not this view is correct is something I won’t consider here.

Since it’s obvious that (at least) one’s cognitive abilities necessarily play some causal role in whether or not one is subjectively rational²⁰, this means that one of the necessary conditions of *Achievement* is met (i.e. the *through ability* condition). But now I need to say something about the other necessary condition of *Achievement* (i.e. the *appropriate goal* condition). I will first establish that subjective rationality is both a personal and societal goal and then briefly say something about whether or not it is an appropriate goal.

According to Eldar Sharif and Robyn LeBoeuf, we have it as a goal (or, expect) for others to be rational. For example, they say,

¹⁹ For more on this see John Broome’s, 2001.

²⁰ See footnote 6.

Apart from those theories [constructed by social scientists] that are about idealized rationality rather than about possible human achievement (see, e.g. Stalnaker 1984, Gardenfors 1988), the requirements of rationality typically imposed are those that we expect people, at least to a first approximation, to be able to fulfill (Sharif & LeBoeuf, 2002, 492).²¹

Nicholas Southwood notes that there is, “[F]rom a third-personal perspective [a] pressure to hold others to account in respect of rational requirements to which they are subject, and to regard those who violate them as appropriate objects of criticism” (Southwood, 2008, 12). For example, imagine that we are aware that Jane intends to go to medical school and believes that it is necessary to take the MCAT in order to get into medical school but never intends to take the MCAT. No doubt in this situation we recognize that something has gone wrong with Jane that we would rather not see go wrong. All other things being equal, we expect Jane to intend what she believes to be a necessary means to something else she intends and so on. And when she doesn’t, we recognize that she’s failed to meet this goal (or expectation). That we have it as a goal for others to be rational holds strong intuitive and experiential appeal.

Further, subjective rationality is often a goal of both formal and informal education. I believe this shows that subjective rationality is a fundamental goal (or expectation) we have for other human beings in our society in particular and in the world more generally. Take for example rational requirements for one to believe what follows by *modus ponens* and other things one believes, the requirement for one to believe what one has conclusive evidence to believe, to not believe *p* if one believes that not-*p*, and so

²¹ By “idealized rationality” Sharif and LeBoeuf mean coherence among one’s attitudes (i.e. subjective rationality) with contents that are true. They say, “It is notable that the predominant theories of rationality are predicated on notions of consistency, not of substance. A person is entitled to a wide range of opinions, beliefs, and preferences; what is important is for these to cohere in a normatively defensible fashion” (2002, 492).

on. Many of us teach introductory logic students to reason using valid inference forms such as *modus ponens* and we discuss the importance of forming beliefs in accord with the evidence one has and so on. And we don't just set it as a goal that our students reason this way in the classroom, we want them to take these reasoning skills with them and reason this way in everyday situations with other people.

Children often begin to learn to comply with rational requirements well before their formal education begins. For example, a father trying to teach his young daughter to be subjectively rational might try to get her to understand that if she intends to get some milk then she will, in circumstances in which no one else will get the milk for her, have to stop playing in order to get the milk. In this case, the father's goal might be to teach his daughter to intend what she believes to be a necessary means to something else she intends or to intend what she has reason to intend.

Lastly, almost no one says to him/herself, "I want to be irrational. It's a goal of mine." In fact, most of us, at one time or another, have thought the exact opposite. Most of us, at least implicitly, set it as a goal (or place on ourselves the expectation) *be rational*. In light of all of this, I conclude that subjective rationality is both a personal and societal goal.

The next issue that has to be addressed is whether or not subjective rationality is an appropriate goal. Intuitively, being rational *is* appropriate. However, one might object that being subjectively rational won't always meet my criteria of appropriateness because

complying with rational requirements can mean, under certain circumstances, one does some pretty awful (or imprudent) things.²²

While I can't explore and defend this here, it could be that rational requirements are best understood as having wide scope and, as such, there are multiple ways to comply with them such that they don't necessarily entail that one do something awful (or imprudent).²³ Either way, I take this worry to be more about the scope of rational requirements than about the appropriateness of subjective rationality as a goal. Since this objection fails and it isn't clear that our intuitions about the appropriateness of being subjectively rational are corrupt, I conclude that subjective rationality *is* an appropriate goal such that it can rightly be considered an achievement. But before moving on, I want to consider one more objection to what I have argued so far.

Objection. One might agree that we set as a goal *be rational* but do so for instrumental reasons and, thus, not for the sake of rationality itself. Therefore, subjective rationality isn't the kind of thing that we have intrinsic reason to pursue or care about.

Response. As I showed earlier, one can have all kinds of instrumental reasons for setting something up as a goal. But this doesn't mean that that same thing, when understood as an achievement, can't also be valuable for its own sake. So, for example, my being subjectively rational is an achievement since it's a personal (and societal) goal and my cognitive abilities are a salient causal feature in me meeting that goal. Subjective

²² Thanks to both Robert English and Eric Wiland for raising versions of this worry.

²³ For more on the scope of rational requirements in general and a defense of the wide scope view see John Brunero's, "The Scope of Rational Requirements" *Philosophical Quarterly* 60 (2010):28-49. See also his "Instrumental Rationality, Symmetry and Scope" *Philosophical Studies* 157 (2012): 125-140. Admittedly, my understanding of achievements lends itself more naturally to a wide-scope view of rational requirements.

rationality is, for me, an instance of a more general valuable kind—it's an instance of the kind ACHIEVEMENT. And as an achievement, being subjectively rational is valuable for its own sake.

Against Claim 2

So far I have provided a plausible argument to the effect that we have reason, in general, to comply with rational requirements for their own sake. First, I argued that if doing something constitutes something of at least *pro tanto* final value then that is, *ceteris paribus*, a reason to do it. Second, I argued that subjective rationality (i.e. complying with rational requirements *because of* one's relevant abilities) is an achievement (on *Achievement*). Third, I argued for the intuitively plausible idea that achievements have *pro tanto* final value. On account of all this, I conclude that we have, in general, reason to comply with rational requirements for their own sake. Thus, *Claim 1* is false.

But now it becomes necessary to respond to *Claim 2*. I still need to provide a plausible response to Kolodny's challenge that even if we have a reason, in general, to comply with rational requirements for their own sake, that fact doesn't entail that we have that same reason in particular cases. I think Kolodny's challenge can be met.

If my Value Argument is sound then the answer to Kolodny's challenge is straightforward. In any particular situation in which one's ϕ -ing would constitute something of final value (e.g. an achievement), then one would have reason to ϕ for its own sake. So, for example, imagine that Jones has the relevant abilities needed to win a basketball tournament. If he set out to win the basketball tournament and did, in fact, win the tournament *because of* exercising his basketball abilities, it follows that his winning

the basketball tournament is an achievement. And if it's right that achievements have final value, his winning the basketball tournament would constitute something that has value for its own sake. And, again, if my Value Argument is sound, Jones has reason to win the basketball tournament for its own sake.

Of course, the value of Jones's winning the basketball tournament and his reason to win the basketball tournament could be outweighed by other considerations. For example, both the value of winning the tournament and his reason to win the tournament could be outweighed if he had reason not to win the tournament, say, because if he did, an innocent person would be killed. But this doesn't mean that Jones has *no* reason to win the basketball tournament. He has *some* reason to win it, namely, because it's an achievement²⁴. And this is true even in cases where that particular reason is outweighed by other considerations.

In a similar way, I want to suggest that one has reason to comply with rational requirements for their own sake even when that reason is outweighed by other considerations because doing so constitutes something that is finally valuable—it constitutes an achievement. Thus, *Claim 2* is false.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued (*contra* Kolodny) that we have, in general, a reason to comply with rational requirements for their own sake. First, I argued that if doing something would produce (or, constitute) something of at least *pro tanto* final value, then that is, *ceteris paribus*, a reason to do it. Second, I argued that being subjectively rational (i.e.

²⁴ When I say he has "some" reason to win the tournament, I mean that whatever reason he has to win it is *insignificant* when compared with his reason not to win the tournament.

complying with rational requirements *because of* one's relevant abilities) is an achievement. Third, I argued that achievements have *pro tanto* final value. Therefore, in general, we have reason to comply with rational requirements for their own sake. I then went on to argue that not only do we have reason to comply with rational requirements in general, rather, we have the same reason to comply with them in particular cases and for their own sake. If all of this is right then I have made a significant, but modest, step toward refuting Niko Kolodny's claim that we don't have intrinsic reason to comply with rational requirements for their own sake. Further, I have provided a positive argument that explains why we have an intrinsic reason to comply with rational requirements for their own sake.

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